

Pearson spot kicks boost Wanderers

TWO late penalties — one in the 90th minute, the other in injury time — gave Wycombe Wanderers an unexpected but deserved victory over Tooting and Mitcham at Loakes Park in the Rothmans Isthmian League on Saturday.

As the last few seconds ticked away it seemed Tooting's controversial 79th minute equaliser would be enough to take a share of the points. But then 'keeper John Dunn gave away the first penalty and three minutes later Steve Grubb handed on the line for the second.

Alan Pearson, the striker everyone in Wycombe is talking about at the moment, hit Dunn first one way, then the other with his two spot kicks to complete a hat-trick on his league debut. Plymouth Reserves' leading goalscorer for the last two seasons, Pearson just oozes confidence and his contribution to this victory was large. His control up front is excellent while it is the little touches of skill that are certain to make him a favourite with the crowd.

But Pearson himself should not take all the honours for the three points. In fact the man of the match tag should be shared by Keith Mead who was a tower of strength at the back. With Alan Phillips having a shaky first half, Keith used all his experience to keep the score down to 0-1. Without him, it could well have been a lot more.

New manager Ted Powell was thrilled to get off to a winning start — especially against a side of Tooting's calibre. But what pleased Ted as much as the result was the character shown by his team. They struggled throughout the first half and found themselves a goal down. Immediately after the break they levelled and then went ahead only to be pulled back to 2-2 amidst a roar of disapproval from the crowd. But instead of settling for the point, Wanderers kept attacking and were justly rewarded in the end. It is character, as much as anything else, that wins honours — and that should stand the Blues in good stead this term.

Four newcomers came into the side for this first game — Mike Sorenson at full back, Alan Davies to midfield and Pearson

Wycombe Wanderers 4, Tooting and Mitcham 2

and George Cleary to the front line. John Priestley was named as substitute. Of the four, Sorenson had the biggest struggle.

Paul Birdseye was forced to switch to left back to accommodate Sorenson, who was up against three good Tooting forwards. The newcomer certainly gave his best but sometimes looked slow. Bobby Davies might have been a better bet, but the manager revealed that Davies was not included because he will be unavailable next Saturday and he did not want to rearrange his side after two matches.

Alan Davies, meanwhile, looked a class player going

forward and scored a fine goal while Cleary had a quiet though effective game in the front three.

Early on, however, things looked bleak for Wanderers. Apart from one or two isolated attacks their team-work and passing was poor — which spelt a frustrating 45 minutes for the crowd, which showed little sympathy. Teams are not built in one game and it is obviously going to take time to mould the Wycombe players into a consistent unit. It was no surprise to me that Tooting were the better looking side early on — they played together last season and had only a couple of team changes from last year.

Wycombe looked distinctly

nervous in the first half and a rather jittery John Maskell didn't add any confidence. Best chance for a Wanderers goal fell to Mick Holfield who mis-hit his shot from 10 yards.

With Roy Mitchell dominating midfield where the Wycombe trio could do nothing to wrest the initiative, it was no surprise when Tooting took a 34th minute lead. Phillips gave away one of too many free kicks and Bobby Green's deep cross was dropped by Maskell. Des Dennis quickly tucked the ball home. Six minutes later Maskell came out to boot the ball clear as Dennis raced in. Both players collided and there was an anxious three minutes before the

goalkeeper could continue.

Whatever advice manager Powell gave to his players at half time certainly did the trick for they hit back to level inside 60 seconds of the new half. Davies had a shot blocked and the ball came out for Pearson to drive home from a narrow angle.

The confidence came flooding back and for the next 20 minutes Wanderers had the visitors on the rack. The trials and tribulations of the first half were forgotten as Wycombe lifted their game which was climaxed by a superb goal in the 65th minute. Pearson picked up possession on half way and beat three players in a marvellous run

before timing a perfect ball to Davies. Tooting's arms were aloft in an appeal for offside but the linesman's flag stayed down. Davies raced on and expertly beat the advancing Dunn with his shot.

But instead of acting as a tonic, the goal signalled a decline in Wycombe's play as Tooting pulled themselves back. They rallied well and in the 79th minute drew level. Maskell went up to gather a high cross from the bottom wing and was challenged by Trevor Ford. The ball spun loose and Dennis was there again to add the finishing touch. Wycombe players and fans alike complained that Maskell had been fouled by Ford, who seemed to be playing the man rather than the ball. Referee Maber said afterwards he felt it was a 50-50 situation and was supported by his linesman who was near the incident.

Maskell then produced two good saves from Green and Alan Ives, the latter at full stretch, before the Blues mounted a final challenge for victory. Dunn pulled out the save of the game to push over Pearson's fine header but then spent his day in the last minute of normal time.

Dylan Evans, who produced some nice touches, flicked the ball through for Pearson who was bearing down on goal when Dunn came racing out and bowled him over. Mr Maber had no doubts about the penalty and Pearson sent the 'keeper the wrong way with his kick.

Three minutes later the fans went wild again as Davies scored Wycombe's fourth at the third attempt. Two shots were blocked but Alan headed home the third only to find that the referee had awarded another penalty for a handling offence by Grubb. Pearson was left with the dilemma of where to place the ball while Dunn decided to go to his left — where Pearson had placed the previous penalty. This time the centre forward sent the ball the other way and cheekily shrugged his shoulders as Dunn stood beaten for the second time.

WYCOMBE: J. Maskell; M. Sorenson, K. Mead, A. Phillips, P. Birdseye; A. Davies, H. Kennedy, M. Holfield; G. Cleary, I. Pearson, D. Evans. Sub. J. Priestley (not used).

TOOTING: J. Dunn; A. Barreclough, R. Highland, S. Grubb, R. Green; J. Keefe (sub. T. Ford 70 mins), B. Mitchell, D. Casey; D. Dennis, D. Junesman, A. Ives.

Referee: T. Maber (Rutlish).

Half-time: 0-1. **Goalscorers:** Wycombe — Pearson 3 (48, 90 pen, 93 pen), Davies (85). Tooting — Dennis 2 (34, 79).

Attendance: 1,400.



Anxious faces surround Wycombe 'keeper John Maskell after his first-half injury against Tooting.